

*"Watchman,
what of the night?"*

"BEHOLD, THE BRIDEGROOM!
Come out to meet Him."

(Mail 25 6 RSV)



THE FACTS ALL IN NOW?

What About the "Dirty Tricks Bag"?

Some fifteen years have now passed since the events occurred involving Merikay McLeod Silver which ultimately forced the Pacific Press into a legal suit with the Federal government. There are still some unanswered questions concerning the briefs and affidavits submitted on behalf of the Church. Further information is now available giving the Pacific Press's side of what happened prior to the initiation of the legal action by the Federal government.

A booklet, written by Richard H. Utt, Merikay's immediate superior at the Press, just recently came to my attention. This booklet, is captioned, Pacific Press Lawsuit: The Other Side of the Story. Written in 1988, it was published independently by the author. It no doubt got lost in the mass of materials being published at the same time in commemoration of the 1888 Centennial. (A question arises at this point, Why didn't the Pacific Press publish it?) I was happy to receive a copy from whatever source it came so that a full picture might be given. In his publication, Utt calls attention to a review of Merikay's book, Betrayal, in Spectrum where a reviewer wrote - "I occasionally wished that I was hearing a more balanced presentation with both sides being granted equal time." (Vol. 16, #5) Utt's booklet does give balance to the picture painted by Merikay of the inter-working relationships within the Press prior to the legal suit. However, he does not deal with key issues which have arisen as a result of the contents of certain briefs and affidavits submitted during the trial nor with the actions taken against a minister of the Church because of his pastoral concern for Merikay. We need more light on these facets, or else are left to conclude that the facts presented in Merikay's book, Betrayal, stand as stated by silent consent.

In this review of the data now available, we will begin with the information which Utt gives from his viewpoint as the then English language Book Editor of the Pacific Press. Passing over the monetary

questions and issues involved which Utt documents well, we will note a charge made in the section, "The Critic Critiqued." Utt writes:

As a novice editor, Merikay was not adverse to slipping her feminist bias into others' manuscripts, to their resentment and dismay. Assigned to work on a manuscript written by a young missionary wife [whom we'll call Jane] and her husband, Merikay found an opportunity to inject her own view and to caricature the General Conference...

Merikay also compiled a small feminist magazine in which she excerpted this missionary couple's story from the unpublished manuscript without their permission. When Jane and her husband learned of both of these actions they were displeased more than a little. They wrote: "We were hurt and discouraged with the way the manuscript and another article were written in a magazine without our permission. We dislike very much having women's lib take over our work that we have put into this manuscript. We are now offering our services to the Pacific Press any way we can be of help, even coming home [from Africa] to testify, if necessary. If anyone has a right to sue anyone we have the right to, after the article she put in her magazine without our permission." (pp. 10-11)

Utt does not place the exact time of this incident in the sequence of events. But if this occurred prior to the initiation of the legal suit and he knew about it, he should have called Merikay into his office, and noting the evidence, dismissed her on the spot. (It is evident that the letter written by the missionary couple was written after the suit was initiated, but were the actions which prompted the letter known prior?) Unethical conduct cannot be justified no matter how sincere may be the convictions one holds. If a book editor cannot professionally do his job without introducing personal bias into a manuscript, then he, or she needs to seek another vocation.

Utt in his review of the case calls attention to the fact that Merikay refused to talk to the Pacific Board chairman, Elder R. R. Bletz, but went directly to a lawyer, Joan Bradford, about the problems. The lawyer in turn wrote to Elder L. H. Bohner, Manager of the Press, "demanding money for Merikay and ordering Bohner not to communicate with her client on the matter except through her, the attorney." (p. 15) Utt observes:

With her attorney in the picture, it was no longer a simple matter of the Press meeting Merikay's demands or of paying "head of household" allowance to Press women. Now there were other unacceptable requirements such as that Attorney Bradford be given a role in Press management to monitor hiring and employment matters, and that

the Press initiate a program leading to the employment of at least 40 percent women in every department of the Press. (*ibid.*, p. 15)

After a short period of further negotiation in seeking an out-of-court settlement, "the General Conference advised the Press to defend itself in court on constitutional grounds, and settle the question, Does the U.S. Government intend to entangle itself in the internal affairs of the Adventist church in violation of the First Amendment?" (*ibid.*) And it was on this issue that the case began in the suit of EEOC v. PPPA. The opening Brief for the Press stated -

This is a suit by the United States against the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

That simple statement is enough to suggest that the case is unusual; but there is more, which shows that the case is fantastic: The Government seeks an injunction which would control the internal affairs of the Church and dictate the manner in which the Church carries on God's work in the world.

The First Amendment -- without which there would have been no Constitution -- became effective one hundred eighty-three years ago, on December 15, 1791, and provides in its opening words,

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

We cannot find that such a case as this has ever before arisen.

The question still remains, why do the briefs and affidavits use such words as, "hierarchical," "first minister," "ecclesiastical superiors," "orders of ministry," "the sacraments," and a comparison to "a cloistered nun"? Further, why does one Brief state, "It is not good Seventh-day Adventism to express... an aversion to Roman Catholicism as such"? Notice, it does not say "Roman Catholics" as individuals, but "Roman Catholicism" as a system.

The quote from the Briefs which has been used most frequently by the dissidents, and improperly credited, perhaps even deliberately, is a footnote in the "Reply Brief for Defendants in Support of Their Motion for Summary Judgment," dated March 3, 1975. This footnote reads:

Although it is true that there was a period in the life of the Seventh-day Adventist Church when the denomination took a distinctly anti-Roman Catholic viewpoint, and the term, "hierarchy" was used in a per-jorative sense to refer to the papal form of church governance, that attitude on the Church's part was

nothing more than a manifestation of widespread anti-papery among conservative protestant denominations in the early part of this century and the latter part of the last, and which has been consigned to the historical trash heap so far as the Seventh-day Adventist Church is concerned.

It has been stated in writing and published that this statement was made by Elder Neal C. Wilson in a sworn affidavit. This is simply not true. To deliberately so state is to lie and to misrepresent the facts. To indulge in such unethical practices, no matter how much one dislikes Elder Wilson, calls in question all of what one has written. The first one to my knowledge to do so was Robert Sessler. In his manuscript, Abomination of Desolation (p. 157), he writes - "In a sworn affidavit from our SDA General Conference President, Neal C. Wilson, he states; quote," (sic) - and the above footnote from the Brief is copied. The reference is even documented as coming from the "Reply Brief." Not to know the difference between a "sworn affidavit" and a "brief" should signal to sincere seekers of truth a warning signal to beware, here is a novice. Another to "run" with this false assertion is David Mould. And he knew better. He had made contact with a brother on the West Coast who had the documents and who told him the facts from these documents, but he went ahead and misrepresented the facts. Further, the facsimile reproduction of the major briefs and affidavits in the EEOC v. PPPA case were available through the Adventist Laymen's Foundation for some years prior to either Sessler or Mould's misuse of the Footnote. These men are without excuse.

What are the facts?

Neal C. Wilson was not appointed president of the General Conference until the Annual Council in 1978. He did not assume office until January 3, 1979. During the time of the Press suit, he was "Vice President for North America of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists" as stated in his sworn affidavit, November 27, 1974. The major thrust of his affidavit was to assert the authority of the General Conference into the activities of the Church at all levels. After stating that the term, "church" has "a very comprehensive and broad meaning" in Seventh-day Adventist nomenclature, he indicated that the word "is used to apply to the organization and headquarters... under the name of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists." He then declared that it was "necessary" for that "Church to establish its authority in the community of believers."

It was Pierson's sworn affidavit given November

30, 1974, which used papal concepts and terms. He plainly stated that he was "president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, which is the Seventh-day Adventist Church." He indicated that he was its "first minister." He spoke of "the orders of ministry" in the church, some of which were authorized "to administer the sacraments."

Who wrote the Footnote in question? No one knows at this point, except that the lawyer who signed the Brief was Malcolm T. Dungan, one of the Counsel for the Defendants, which included Boardman Noland, a Seventh-day Adventist lawyer, in the employ of the General Conference. Who authorized its inclusion in the Brief? There is no question but that it had to have had the approval of the leadership of the Church. It was a **Church** decision in the light cast by the two Affidavits, wherein the General Conference is defined as the Church. Appearing in the Brief, and not in either Affidavit, it was a corporate act.

There are two other points which Merikay makes in her book, Betrayal, which are neither noted nor discussed in Utt's The Other Side of the Story. We must conclude the accuracy of Merikay's account based on Utt's silence in not even mentioning nor alluding to these allegations.

Elder Leonard Mills at the beginning of the Press problem was pastor of the Milpitas, California, Seventh-day Adventist Church. He had been a pastor in Michigan when Merikay was a teenager there. He invited Merikay and her husband to join the church, since they were feeling very uncomfortable in the Press "family" church at Mountain View. Mills was also called as a witness at the trial in behalf of Merikay. For this he was threatened by Elder Neal C. Wilson. Wilson is quoted as telling Mills - "if you testify in Merikay's behalf you'll be disfellowshipped; and you'll loose your job and your retirement." (Betrayal, p. 295)

Apparently this was not all of the "dirty tricks" in the Church's bag. One Sabbath, February 22, 1975, when attending the Milpitas Church, Merikay discovers that Elder Mills is no longer the pastor. "A parent whose children attend the church day-care center filed child-molesting charges against him, and the Conference asked him to step aside." (ibid., p. 276) The case was finally dropped for lack of evidence. However, Elder Mills went to the police station to examine the records in the case. The record indicated "that the president of the local, employing conference, the Northern California Conference, told the police that the conference

and he would cooperate in any way necessary to secure Mills' conviction." (*ibid.*, p. 329)

This was not the first time such "tricks" have been employed, and it is doubtful it will be the last time. While it is essential that the whole picture of the Press case be presented in as balanced a way as the human emotions of those involved can portray it, honesty also requires that those seeking to balance the picture as Utt tried to do, address some of these other facets raised by Merikay in her book. Either contrary evidence should be given, or the accuracy of the allegations admitted. By a clear, honest admittance where demanded - Utt would have strengthened the integrity of his position. But with his silence, we can accept at face value, the revelation of threat and undercover acts from the Church's "dirty tricks" bag as revealed by Merikay in her book. It is a rather dark, black picture of the behind-the-scenes working of the Church to achieve its objectives.

All the dark side of the EEOC v. PPPA suit does not justify the unethical use of the now infamous Footnote by those who wish "to vent their spleen" on Neal C. Wilson. What he did - his administrative techniques - were bad enough without adding unethical misrepresentation of facts. A professed Christian shows his integrity by his honesty and his dishonesty shows his lack of such integrity.

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"Geopolitics Within Seventh-day Adventism"

In the final issue of *The Christian CENTURY* for 1990 (December 19-26, pp. 1197-1203), the editors published an article on "Geopolitics Within Seventh-day Adventism." Written by Ronald Larson, a teacher in sociology at Queens College connected with the City University of New York, the main thrust of the analysis was to show the growing tension within Adventism between the home base in North America, and the growing membership in Latin America, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Pacific islands.

Lawson highlighted his analysis by noting that in 1890, 91% of the membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church came from North America, but by 1989, only 12%. In a one man, one vote

mentality, the home base is out voted. However, the North American Division supplies 97% of all the tithe received by the General Conference. Based on actual support of the Church, the voice of the constituency outside of North America would be but a whisper. But this is not the reality of the situation. The representatives of the two largest divisions, both Latin American, were the largest block on the 1990 General Conference nominating committee. While they could not of themselves topple Wilson, their power did influence the selection of a successor. Instead of the Spirit of God at work, it was power politics in the election process.

There appears to be a reason for this present imbalance in the geopolitics of Adventism. Lawson notes that unlike other mainstream Protestant churches who have carried on an extensive missionary program, Seventh-day Adventists did not develop national churches, but rather created a centralized system reaching out from Washington D.C. (now Maryland). "The influence of this American-based hierarchy has resulted in an Americanized church." This is being challenged, and the discord is beginning to surface in the General Conference sessions.

An illustration of this discord is in the issue of women's ordination to the ministry. While support for this un-Biblical innovation is far from unanimous in the North American Division, it is totally unacceptable by the Latin American divisions. Beyond this is the demand for a voice in the power structure. It is even referred to as the appointment of "cardinals" (vice presidents) to the top hierarchy of the Church. This has resulted in unqualified and inexperienced persons being elevated to high places in the Church. On the other hand some well trained men from outside of the United States now have been given both voice and leadership in certain departments of the Church. In other words, the developing geopolitics within Adventism seems to be a "mixed bag" with no apparent means available to control the process.

This analysis by Lawson pinpointed a basic problem within Adventism which underlies most of the present disunity and apostasy within the Church. He noted "Harvest '90," the outreach program which aimed at adding 2 million members to the Church between 1985 and 1990. Statistically, the goal was surpassed by 500,000 bringing the membership to 6.4 million. But the weaknesses of the program were never addressed. Competition between divisions led to

such pressure on the ministry to win converts that people were often baptized who barely understood the faith. Further, these ministers under pressure failed to nurture the converts with a resulting high apostasy rate, which was covered up. Keep in mind that the delegate strength to the General Conference sessions is based on membership including apostates still on the church records. But beneath all of this is the lack of and the nature of the instruction being given to baptismal candidates.

The present "numbers" game began in earnest at the 1950 General Conference in the election of W. H. Branson to the presidency. He called for the doubling of the Church membership in four years. At the 1952 Bible Conference, Branson declared:

We are engaged in an effort to double our church membership in a four-year period from January 1, 1950, to December 31, 1953. Some have reckoned such a goal to be preposterous. But is it? When the first Pentecost came the church doubled its members in one day. The reception of the righteousness of Christ by the church today will bring a second Pentecost. Revelation 18:1-3 will be fulfilled. Thousands will be converted in a day as the message of salvation through Christ swells to a loud and mighty cry. (Our Firm Foundation, Vol. II, p. 617)

Prior to this, Branson had rationalized that "the message of righteousness by faith given in the 1888 Conference has been repeated here" (meaning the 1952 Bible Conference) with much greater power than at the 1888 session because of the added light cast upon the subject in the Writings. (p. 616)

It is true that a review of the messages given at the 1952 Bible Conference contained the theory of the truth. One discordant note was Heppenstall's presentation. How much and what was edited from his presentation when it appeared in the two volume report of the Bible Conference would be a research paper in itself. It is a verified fact that a questionnaire sent to pastors and church leaders prior to the conference probing their belief in the nearness of Christ's return was deleted from another presentation. It revealed that "the blessed hope" was growing dim in the hearts of the church's ministers.

Two years prior to the Bible Conference, Wieland and Short called for a "denominational repentance" as the answer to the Church's need for revival. It went unheeded; the Bible Conference was used as a facade to cover the rejection of the call to such a repentance. The substituted "numbers game" began in earnest. It

has not ceased. But into this picture must be programmed several important factors.

Large scale evangelism was carried forward during the 1950s in the cities of America and overseas. Big name evangelists in Adventism mark the period. These men in the long series of meetings they held proclaimed the basic truths. The weak link was the preparation given those who accepted the message prior to their baptism. One of these evangelists with whom I worked actually accepted as a fact that 20% of those baptized would apostatize, but it was the total number baptized which counted. Gradually into this picture came the doctrinal apostasy resulting from the SDA-Evangelical Conferences of 1955-1956. The teaching of the sanctuary truth was muted and now practically abandoned. This same demphasis marked the training of the ministerial students in the colleges and seminary. Enough decades have now passed so that very few people in the pew know what the truth committed to the Advent Movement really was. They know little or nothing of our church history, or what has taken place since 1950. The younger ministers due to their training cannot now preach "the faith once delivered unto the saints" - they don't know it!

Now we have apostasy accepted as orthodoxy; we have disunity unified under a central command system; and we have dissident voices mouthing every wind of doctrine. Yet the "numbers" game goes on. We try to shake the tree instead of hand-picking the fruit. As a result bruised fruit which soon turns rotten becomes a part of the boxes (churches) of fruit. Issues arise within the Church exactly like the issues the other churches of the world face because we have made converts after the manner of the world leaving in these new adherents to the Church, the same philosophies which they had in the churches from which they came. They are not converted. Instilled in those who aspire to be future ministers of the Church, are the same social agendas which the seminaries of the churches of the world teach their ministerial graduates. Instead of being in the world, but not of the world, we are both in the world and of the world.

If we would have taken the Bible and its message for this time, and would have modelled our social agenda around the counsels of the Writings, the picture today would have been different and the "geopolitics" within Adventism would not be as described in the article in The Christian CENTURY.

LET'S TALK IT OVER

Yesterday (January 17), I received a packet of documents and tapes from friends who had forwarded the same to me in the same envelope in which they had received the material. Interestingly, on the outside had been placed a label on which had been printed Proverbs 18:17 from the Living Bible. It read: "Any story sounds good, unless someone tells the other side and sets the record straight." In this issue, we endeavored to add balance to the Merikay Silver case involving the PPPA by noting some things Richard Utt wrote in telling the Press' side of the story. But how can one give a full picture where very serious allegations are made, such as we have noted, and there is no rebuttal forthcoming, and more than five years have passed since they were made?

The packet of material contained the tapes, letters, and documents which Charles Wheeling has prepared to justify his teachings in light of the fact his membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church is being called into question. The other side, the Church's side, of the story was also included by these friends. I doubt that the original packet contained these documents. He is being charged with using Roman Catholic hermeneutics invented by the Jesuit Ribera in explaining Bible Prophecy. It might be closer to the truth to allege that Wheeling is in the camp with Desmond Ford and his apotelesmatic concepts, plus a few of Wheeling's own meanderings.

Wheeling is not the only one coming under fire. A letter from Florida brought a copy of the action taken by the Florida Conference's Executive Committee against John Osborne. In it, the Committee charges Osborne with having "borne false witness." Our own experience with John Osborne leads us to believe that the Committee has "hit the nail on the head." Then this same week, I received a telephone call requesting some documentation involving Ron Spear as the Church is seeking to zero in on him in regard to some of the false doctrine he is teaching under the guise of being on "the firm foundation." For the present, I will watch developments, and then when it appears all of the facts are in, or the preponderance of evidence is available in any of the above cases, we will comment in WWN, or the Commentary with the documentation. At the moment, the Wheeling case has already reached the "preponderance of evidence" level, but needs to be carefully analyzed. While what Wheeling claims

has been his motivation has merit, and I can empathize with that, the avenues of Biblical interpretation he has pursued are totally at variance with his motivation, and a radical departure from truth.

In the first article, seeking to add balance to the EEOC v. PPPA legal suit, we challenged the ethics of certain dissidents in their use of the legal data. The reader might assume that in the case of Robert Sessler, we were calling him into account on the matter of only one misrepresentation of fact, and that this was too harsh an evaluation. This is not the case. While it is true that the citation had to do with this legal suit and his comments on one of its briefs, the pattern of faulty assumptions and documentation which mark a novice, are rather consistent.

His first publication - The Abomination of Desolation - was reviewed in our first issue of Commentary. While this issue did have a limited circulation, and is presently exhausted, it was read by one of his close supporters who responded vigorously. This past Fall, Sessler was in this area speaking. I attended his meetings which promised a question and answer period, which didn't materialize during the time I could stay. I finally took leave at an opportune moment, but requested that he answer just one question: "Did he still stand by his first publication, The Abomination of Desolation?" To this, I received a positive affirmation. In this book, besides the inaccurate allegation regarding Elder Wilson, there are other glaring jumbings of truth. We will note one of these.

In the manuscript, p. 127, Sessler charges that the Church has "tampered with Mrs. White's testimony." He underscores this for emphasis. The testimony to which he refers is Spirit of Prophecy, Vol. IV, p. 232. He uses this to document his assertion - "Some still refuse to believe that our professed SDA church has been denounced as Babylon," indicating this testimony so states. He then quotes it with the emphasis as indicated:

The term Babylon, derived from Babel, and signifying confusion, is applied in Scripture to the various forms of false or apostate religion. But the message announcing the fall of Babylon must apply to some religious body that was once pure, and has become corrupt. It cannot be the Romish church which is here meant; for that church has been in a fallen condition for many centuries.

Sessler would have you believe that Ellen G. White means by noting "some religious body

that was once pure" but "has become corrupt," the Seventh-day Adventist Church. But he did not complete the paragraph which tells to what Ellen G. White was referring. The very next sentence reads:

But how appropriate the figure as applied to the Protestant churches, all professing to derive their doctrines from the Bible, yet divided into almost innumerable sects. (*ibid.*, pp. 232-233)

Sessler quotes the parallel statement as it appeared in the 1911 edition of The Great Controversy, noting one alteration and one addition. Then he writes: "What deception! They change the writings of Mrs. White because they do not like the straight testimony." (Emphasis his) But what do you call pulling a statement out of context, and trying to make it say what it does not? Then to deliberately ignore the explanatory sentence which clarifies the quoted statement, what does one call that? Aggravated deception?

In October, 1987, a dissident magazine published a letter written by Sessler to Ron Spear. In this letter, he wrote:

But she [Ellen G. White] also says: "There is hope neither in Sardis nor Laodicea. Out of this experience must come the victors into that of Philadelphia - brotherly love. He has no promise for Laodicea as a whole." (Signs of the Times, Jan. 17, 1911)

Ellen White did not write this!! It was written by the editor at the time, Elder Milton C. Wilcox. But the conclusion drawn by Sessler compounds his error. He wrote - "Our leaders just happened to leave this article out of Vol. 4 [of the facsimile reprint of the Ellen G. White articles from the Signs] but Praise God it got into our hands." The leaders did not "just happen" to leave it out; they were reproducing Ellen G. White articles, not Wilcox's. But when it did get into Sessler's hands what did he do with it? Pervert its authorship to give it more weight and authority.

It is my understanding that Sessler was professionally in a paramedical field before becoming one of the "many voices" described by Ellen G. White to come at this time. (See R&H, Dec. 13, 1893) If his accuracy in that field was as it is now in his documentation, how many lives were placed in jeopardy? But his present misrepresentation and falsification involves eternal life. Isn't it time to "cast off the works of darkness" and "put on the armour of light"?

WHG

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"The prayer 'Thy Kingdom come,' if we only knew, is asking God to conduct a major operation." (George A. Buttrick, So We Believe, So We Pray)

Isn't it time for such an operation? Then daily, let us so pray!

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